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ABSTRACT

Vocational education has been greatly increasing its services to special needs populations. For example, the enrollments reported by the states for school year 1982-83 indicate a 38 percent increase in the number of handicapped persons served in vocational education, a 65 percent increase in the number of disadvantaged served, and a 163 percent increase in the number of limited English speaking (LEP) students served in vocational education since 1980-81. The Carl D. Perkins Vocational Education Act sets forth the following new emphases: (1) the provision of information to handicapped, disadvantaged, and LEP students regarding the opportunities available in vocational education; (2) the requirement that each handicapped, disadvantaged, or LEP student enrolling in vocational education receive an assessment of his or her interests, abilities, and special needs with respect to completing a vocational education program successfully; and (3) the mandate of counseling services to facilitate the transition of handicapped and disadvantaged students from school to employment. The Vocational Education Act also contains, for the first time, equal access language as it pertains to these populations. Special needs vocational educators have a tremendous responsibility in ensuring that these laws are followed and that vocational education is responsive to the special needs of handicapped, disadvantaged, and limited English proficiency students. (KC)

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BRINGING NATIONAL ISSUES INTO FOCUS FOR SPECIAL POPULATIONS: THE ASSISTANT SECRETARY'S PERSPECTIVE

PRESENTED TO

THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE OF STATE VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

SPECIAL NEEDS PERSONNEL

BY

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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I AM DELIGHTED TO SPEAK WITH YOU TODAY AND SHARE SOME OF THE ISSUES RELATING TO SPECIAL POPULATIONS IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION FROM MY PERSPECTIVE. THIS IS AN EXCELLENT PROGRAM OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF SPECIAL NEEDS STATE ADMINISTRATORS. IT EMPHASIZES THE IMPORTANCE OF STATE LEADERSHIP, PARTICULARLY IN THIS TIME OF CHANGE AND CHALLENGES. THIS IS A TIME OF CRITICISM OF PUBLIC EDUCATION, AND THERE IS A TREND TOWARD STIFFENING ACADEMIC REQUIREMENTS FOR STUDENTS, WHILE VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IS IN DANGER OF BEING DISPLACED. BUT WE CAN TAKE HEART IN THE STUDY, EDUCATION FOR TOMORROW'S JOBS, WHICH CONCLUDED THAT VOCATIONAL EDUCATION SHOULD BE EMPHASIZED EQUALLY FOR STUDENTS PREPARING FOR WORK AS COLLEGE PREPARATORY COURSES ARE EMPHASIZED FOR STUDENTS PLANNING TO GO TO COLLEGE.

AS YOU ARE WELL AWARE, VOCATIONAL EDUCATION LEGISLATION HAS FOCUSED ON SERVICES TO SPECIAL POPULATIONS, ESPECIALLY HANDICAPPED AND DISADVANTAGED SINCE 1963. THERE IS A NATURAL BOND BETWEEN OUR TWO AREAS. AT THE FEDERAL LEVEL, THE OFFICE OF VOCATIONAL AND ADULT EDUCATION HAS A JOINT AGREEMENT WITH THE OFFICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION AND REHABILITATIVE SERVICES, AND WE HAVE A TRADITION OF WORKING TOGETHER. SINCE 1963, EACH NEW PIECE OF LEGISLATION HAS BROUGHT THE PRIORITY OF SERVICES TO SPECIAL POPULATIONS MORE CLEARLY INTO FOCUS AND EXPANDED THE POPULATION GROUPS TO BE SERVED.

DURING THE PAST TWO DECADES, SINCE THE PASSAGE OF THE VOCATIONAL EDUCATION ACT OF 1963 AND ITS SUBSEQUENT AMENDMENTS, A NEW CADRE OF LEADERS HAS

EVOLVED IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION. THAT IS THE GROUP, OF WHICH YOU ARE SUCH AN INTEGRAL PART, REFERRED TO AS VOCATIONAL SPECIAL NEEDS PERSONNEL.

THE TOTAL VOCATIONAL EDUCATION PROFESSION IS INDEBTED TO THIS GROUP FOR THE LEADERSHIP PROVIDED IN DEFINING VOCATIONAL EDUCATION'S ROLE IN SERVING HANDICAPPED, DISADVANTAGED AND LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT STUDENTS AND ESPECIALLY FOR THE EXPERTISE DISPLAYED IN CREATING AND REFINING INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES TO MEET THE SPECIAL NEEDS OF HANDICAPPED, DISADVANTAGED, AND LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT STUDENTS IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION. YOUR LEADERSHIP HAS HELPED VOCATIONAL EDUCATION INCREASE AND IMPROVE SERVICES TO THESE STUDENTS.

THE ENROLLMENTS REPORTED BY THE STATES FOR SCHOOL YEAR 1982-83 INDICATE A 38% INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF HANDICAPPED SERVED IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION, A 65% INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF DISADVANTAGED, AND 163% INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT STUDENTS SERVED IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION SINCE 1980-81. FROM 1976 TO THE PRESENT, THE PERCENTAGE OF DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS ENROLLED IN MAINSTREAM VOCATIONAL EDUCATION PROGRAMS HAS INCREASED FROM APPROXIMATELY 30% TO 78%, AND THE PERCENTAGE OF HANDICAPPED ENROLLMENT IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN THE MAINSTREAM HAS INCREASED FROM APPROXIMATELY 30% TO 75%. WE DO NOT HAVE RECORDS ON LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT FROM 1976; HOWEVER, 57% OF LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT ENROLLED IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION WERE IN MAINSTREAM PROGRAMS IN THE 1982-83 SCHOOL YEAR.

WE KNOW THAT THIS PROGRESS HAS BEEN DUE TO YOUR DEDICATION AND COMMITMENT TO VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND TO THE HANDICAPPED AND DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS.

AS WE LOOK TO THE FUTURE WE ARE EXCITED ABOUT THE INCREASED OPPORTUNITIES PROVIDED SPECIAL POPULATIONS THROUGH THE CARL D. PERKINS VOCATIONAL EDUCATION ACT. I CHALLENGE YOU TO DISPLAY THE SAME CREATIVE INITIATIVE, COMMITMENT AND PROFESSIONAL INTEGRITY IN ASSISTING ALL VOCATIONAL EDUCATORS IN IMPLEMENTING PROGRAMS AND SERVICES TO SERVE THE SPECIAL NEEDS OF HANDICAPPED, DISADVANTAGED, AND LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT STUDENTS UNDER THIS NEW LEGISLATION AS YOU HAVE DISPLAYED IN THE PAST.

THE NEW EMPHASES SET FORTH IN THE CARL D. PERKINS VOCATIONAL EDUCATION ACT THAT I FIND ESPECIALLY EXCITING IN TERMS OF IMPACT ON STUDENTS ARE:

1. THE PROVISION OF INFORMATION TO HANDICAPPED, DISADVANTAGED, AND LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT STUDENTS REGARDING THE OPPORTUNITIES AVAILABLE IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION. THIS IS A POSITIVE VEHICLE FOR INCREASING PUBLIC UNDERSTANDING OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION. I WOULD ENCOURAGE ALL LOCAL EDUCATION AGENCIES TO DIRECT SUCH AN ACTIVITY TO ALL POTENTIAL STUDENTS AND THEIR PARENTS. WHILE SUCH A BROADER BASED APPROACH IS DESIRABLE, AND IN FACT MAY BE IN OPERATION IN MANY SCHOOL DISTRICTS, IT IS IMPORTANT THAT A SPECIFIC PLAN DIRECTED TO THE TARGETED POPULATIONS AND THEIR PARENTS BE DEVELOPED.

2. THE REQUIREMENT THAT EACH HANDICAPPED, DISADVANTAGED AND LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT STUDENT ENROLLING IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION RECEIVE AN ASSESSMENT OF HIS OR HER INTERESTS, ABILITIES AND SPECIAL NEEDS WITH RESPECT TO COMPLETING A VOCATIONAL EDUCATION

PROGRAM SUCCESSFULLY. I CONSIDER THIS TO BE A CHALLENGING RESPONSIBILITY THAT WILL, IN MANY SCHOOL DISTRICTS, REQUIRE THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEW INSTRUCTIONAL AND COUNSELING STRATEGIES, NEW STAFF DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES, AS WELL AS THE NEED TO COORDINATE WITH A VARIETY OF OTHER AGENCIES, ESPECIALLY AND MOST IMPORTANTLY, SPECIAL EDUCATION

3. COUNSELING SERVICES TO FACILITATE THE TRANSITION OF HANDICAPPED AND DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS FROM SCHOOL TO EMPLOYMENT. THIS ACTIVITY HELPS FACILITATE THE TRANSITION OF HANDICAPPED STUDENTS AS ENCOURAGED BY OFFICE OF SPECIAL EDUCATION AND REHABILITATIVE SERVICES AND EXPANDS THAT CONCEPT TO THE TRANSITION OF DISADVANTAGED AND LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT STUDENTS.

   IT ENTAILS CLOSE COORDINATION WITH GUIDANCE AND COUNSELING PERSONNEL AS WELL AS WITH THE AGENCIES SERVING HANDICAPPED PERSONS, NAMELY, REHABILITATION, SPECIAL EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENTAL DISABILITIES.

SPECIAL MENTION OF THESE ACTIVITIES IN NO WAY LESSENS THE IMPORTANCE OF OTHER ACTIVITIES INDICATED IN THE LAW TO BE PROVIDED TO HANDICAPPED, DISADVANTAGED AND LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT STUDENTS. I HAVE SIMPLY POINTED OUT THREE NEWLY MNDATED ACTIVITIES THAT, I BELIEVE, WILL IMPROVE VOCATIONAL EDUCATION SERVICES TO HANDICAPPED, DISADVANTAGED AND LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT STUDENTS.

I MUST ALSO CALL YOUR ATTENTION TO THE INCLUSION OF EQUAL ACCESS LANGUAGE

IN THIS LAW AS IT PERTAINS TO HANDICAPPED AND DISADVANTAGED PERSONS. SERVICES TO THESE POPULATION GROUPS HAVE BEEN A MAJOR FOCUS FOR NEARLY TWO DECADES. THIS IS THE FIRST TIME, HOWEVER, THAT EQUAL ACCESS LANGUAGE HAS BEEN INCLUDED. THIS GOES BEYOND THE CONCEPT THAT WE PROVIDE ADDITIONAL SERVICES BECAUSE A STUDENT IS HANDICAPPED OR DISADVANTAGED.

VOCATIONAL EDUCATORS MUST ALSO BE COGNIZANT OF THE OTHER STATUTES, SUCH AS SECTION 504 OF THE REHABILITATION ACT OF 1973 AND P.L. 94-142 EDUCATION OF HANDICAPPED CHILDREN ACT, WHICH IMPACT UPON VOCATIONAL EDUCATION AND THE SERVICES AVAILABLE TO HANDICAPPED STUDENTS.

YOU HAVE A TREMENDOUS RESPONSIBILITY IN PROVIDING LEADERSHIP IN VOCATIONAL EDUCATION TO INSURE THAT THE REQUIREMENTS OF EACH OF THESE LAWS ARE MET, WHILE AT THE SAME TIME INSURING THAT VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IS ADEQUATELY ATTENDING TO THE SPECIAL NEEDS OF HANDICAPPED, DISADVANTAGED AND LIMITED ENGLISH PROFICIENT STUDENTS.

THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION'S CONTINUING THRUST TOWARD EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION IS A BACKDROP FOR ALL THAT YOU ARE DOING IN PROVIDING SERVICES TO SPECIAL NEEDS STUDENTS AND IMPLEMENTING NEW, PRESCRIPTIVE LEGISLATION. IT IS SO IMPORTANT THAT WE BE CONSTANTLY VIGILANT OF THIS CONCERN FOR EXCELLENCE. I SUPPORT THE STATEMENT MADE BY THE EDUCATION COMMISSION OF THE STATES' TASK FORCE ON EDUCATION FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH IN THE REPORT "ACTION FOR EXCELLENCE: THE CHALLENGE IS NOT SIMPLY TO BETTER EDUCATE OUR ELITE, BUT TO RAISE BOTH THE FLOOR AND CEILING OF ACHIEVEMENT IN AMERICA."

IN CLOSING, I WANT TO CONGRATULATE YOU ON THE PROGRAM YOU HAVE PLANNED FOR

THESE THREE DAYS. I ESPECIALLY SUPPORT YOUR EFFORTS TO INVOLVE SUCH A WIDE ARRAY OF AGENCIES AND OFFICES WITHIN THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION. IT IS CLEAR THAT WE MUST WORK COOPERATIVELY WITH OTHERS IF WE ARE TO PROVIDE THE SERVICES STUDENTS NEED AND, AT THE SAME TIME, RAISE BOTH THE FLOOR AND CEILING OF ACHIEVEMENT.

THANK YOU FOR THIS OPPORTUNITY TO SHARE MY THOUGHTS WITH YOU AND ESPECIALLY FOR THE OUTSTANDING CONTRIBUTION YOU ARE MAKING TO VOCATIONAL EDUCATION.